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ABSTRACT

In the past quarter of a century, subtle and important changes in both the subject matter and format of collections organized for special collections departments have taken place, and many special collections now contain significant printed "papers" and manuscript collections of research quality in addition to the printed book. Such materials, which may vary widely in format and content, offer the librarian what is initially an inexpensive way to mount an active collections program that can be as relevant to the community as it is to the research and instruction programs of the university. Indeed, if the special collections department is to play an active role in the intellectual life of the university, special collections librarians must begin to learn how papers and other non-book collections support instruction and research in fields that often bypass the library; for example, the field of popular culture, which has been neglected by librarians, but would be especially suited to special collections. If special collections librarians are to remain information brokers rather than becoming mere caretakers, they must adopt new strategies, e.g., being alert to fields like popular culture that are neglected by other areas of the library, examining existing special collections to identify materials of research value in such fields, and working with the faculty and administration to acquire appropriate collections regardless of the format. Eight references are provided. (KM)

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BEYOND THE BOOK: COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AND THE SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARIAN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this position paper is to examine energies for transition as they relate to special collections librarianship with attention focused on collection development. The role of "papers" collections and non-print materials is presented as an important component of special collections. The field of popular culture is cited as an example of the need for primary research materials in non-traditional fields.

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"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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In A Canticle for Leibowitz, Walter M. Miller's extraordinary novel of a small, southwestern monastery and its efforts over more than twelve centuries to save the "Memorabilia", the bits of knowledge that survived a hydrogen holocaust in the 1960s, a priest reflects on his fear of the future. It is the third millinnium and he understands that now, after so many hundreds of years, a renaissance is imminent. He says to his friend, Benjamin, the hermit:

> "Do you realize how much things have changed in the past two centuries? ... Since the death of the last civilization, the Memorabilia has been our special province, Benjamin. And we've kept it. But now? I sense the predicament of the shoemaker who tries to sell shoes in the village of shoemakers."
>
> The hermit smiled. "It could be done, if he manufactures a special and superior type of shoe."
>
> "I'm afraid the secular scholars are already beginning to lay claim to such a method."
>
> "Then go out of the shoemaking business, before you are ruined."[1]

As with the priest, change is no stranger to the special collections librarian. Forty years ago the term special collections was infrequently used, and keepers of rare books and manuscripts, "operated quite outside the pattern of organized libraries. Each group, the rare book curators and the general librarians, tended to be suspicious of the other and thus there was little opportunity for fruitful conversation or cooperative effort."[2] With the organization of the Rare Book and Manuscript (RBMS) Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in 1958, one of the most important of many developments for special collections

librarians during the 1950s and 1960s, much of that suspicion disappeared. Today, special collections librarians find themselves integrated in the mainstream of librarianship. Their contributions in areas such as library security and conservation/preservation are highly valued by the profession at large. Their work in computer-assisted systems for cataloging books and related materials, and the role they play in national as well as international bibliographic projects (such as the ESTC, the Eighteenth Century Short-Title Catalogue, a computer-assisted retrospective bibliographical project) is accomplished with the cooperation and support of the general librarian. RBMS continues to play an increasing role in these and other projects, through its committees, conferences, and publications. However, if special collections librarianship is to avoid the predicament of the shoemaker in a village of shoemakers, attention must be directed to an area especially crucial to the special collections librarian--collection development.

For many librarians the very term "special collections" conjures up images of the rare book and manuscript collections described with such eloquence by distinguished librarian-scholars of an earlier period: William Warner Bishop, William Jackson, Robert Vosper and Louis B. Wright, to name only a few. These collections, dominated by holdings in classical literature, history, theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, science and mathematics, reflected pre-World War II university curricula. Yet in the past quarter of a century, subtle and important changes in both the subject matter and format of collections organized for special collections departments have taken place.

In addition to the printed book, many special collections departments now contain significant printed "papers" and manuscript collections of research quality. These may vary from neighborhood and local records, corporate archives, underground materials to the wide range of materials produced by issue-oriented groups. The list is extensive. They offer the librarian what is initially an inexpensive way to mount an active special collections program, one which can be as relevant to the community as it is to the research and instruction programs of the university. But there are other reasons, too, why special collections librarians are collecting these materials. For many smaller institutions, the contraction of the rare book market, coupled with steep price increases makes the acquisition of rare books prohibitive. Private collections of research quality are becoming as scarce as the institutional funds to purchase them. And the gradual disappearance (concomitant with the rise of the modern academic research library with its extensive system of networks and interlibrary loan systems) of that staple of the special collections department, the faculty member's personal research library, closes still another door.

Papers collections, indeed, most non-book materials housed in special collections departments must receive more attention from RBMS members as well as the general librarian. They remain an important component of many special collections departments and they have their own set of problems in the areas of acquisitions, accessioning and cataloging, storage, accessing, preservation, and security, all of which need to be addressed. If the special collections department is to play

an active role in the intellectual life of the university, special collections librarians must begin to learn how papers and other non-book collections support instruction and research in fields that often bypass the library. Certainly there are many. Urban history, social welfare, women's studies, mass communication, the performing arts, industrial, graphic, and communication design are a few of the new fields that are often represented in the library by secondary, rather than primary research materials. Many faculty in these areas, and some librarians, cry out to deaf ears for library support.

One such example is the field of popular culture. In 1973 an article appeared in College & Research Libraries calling for academic libraries to support this generally ignored area.[3] Four years after the publication of that article, studies concerned with popular culture and the library began to appear with increasing frequency. In 1978 the University of Kentucky in Lexington published the proceedings of a symposium it held on popular culture and the library.[4] The Drexel Library Quarterly devoted an entire issue to popular culture in 1980. A recent (1985) book is entirely concerned with the subject of popular culture and in 1985 College & Research Libraries published a major article on the subject.[5] The three topics most often treated in this extensive literature are 1) descriptions of existing popular culture collections, 2)rationales for including popular culture holdings in academic libraries, and 3) the need to introduce the field of popular culture to library science education.[6] A number of articles contain stinging rebukes to the librarian. Writes one author: "A cursory survey of the list of topics discussed at

any annual meeting of the PCA (Popular Culture Association) makes it quite clear that what librarians have traditionally identified as "trash", "entertainment", and "escape literature" are the basic resources of popular culture research."[7]

Popular culture is a field especially suited to special collections, where many of the materials of the field may already lay buried in existing collections. And any consideration of popular culture necessarily raises another issue of importance to special collections librarians: the collection of non-print materials. Many of the newed fields rely on a wide range of materials, including non-print, to understand and interpret the meaning and background of the subject or period under study. When American-Lithuanians mounted a "Ban the Soviets" campaign against Soviet participation at the 1984 Olympics held in Los Angeles, they generated a whole body of printed and manuscript material: letters, reports, broadsides, newspaper articles to list just a few. They also mounted a series of local television interviews, which were video-taped, and which convey information no student or scholar of this issue can afford to be without.

Information comes in many forms today. Nine Matheson writes: "We know that there is a total restructuring in progress of who, what, and how information is created, owned, and shared. We librarians, no less than steelworkers, will be out of work unless we, like them, reexamine our basic assumptions and develop new strategies for staying in business."[8] One strategy for the special collections librarian is to be alert to fields like popular culture which are neglected by other areas of the library. Another is to comb existing special collections to identify materials of research value in these fields that already exist. A third strategy

is to work with the faculty and library administration to acquire appropriate collections regardless of the format. In a world where the the book no longer serves as the central mode of communication, the librarian will need to consider the full range of materials available. The disinclination to collect anything but the book will quickly turn the special collections librarian into a caretaker rather than a broker of information. Should that occur, then like the shoemaker, the librarian might as well as go out of business.

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1. Walter M. Miller, Jr. A Canticle for Leibowitz (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 143-44.

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3. Jack A. Clarke, "Popular Culture in Libraries," College & Research Libraries 34 (May 1973), p. 215-18.

4. Wayne Wiegand, ed., Current Issues Symposium II: Popular Culture and the Library (Lexington: Office of Continuing Education, College of Library Science, University of Kentucky, 1978).

5. Robert G. Sewell, "Trash or Treasure? Pop Fiction in Academic and and Research Libraries," College and Research Libraries 45 (Nov. 1984), pp. 450-61; Frank W. Hoffman, Popular Culture and Libraries Hamden: Library Professional Publications, 1985).

6. Major popular culture collections include the Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green University, the Nye Popular Culture Collection at Michigan State University, the Hess Collection at the University of Minnesota, as well as collections housed in the Library of Congress, the Special Collections Division at the University of Kansas Library, Kent State University Library, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the Wisconsin State Historical Society Library.

7. Gordon Stevenson, "The Wayward Scholar: Resources and Research in Popular Culture," Library Trends, 25 (April 1977), p. 779-818.

8. Nina W. Matheson, "The Academic Library Nexus," College & Research Libraries 45 (May 1984), p. 208.